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A change in our position

The Globe will resume accepting cigarette advertising after refusing the cigarette industry the right to advertise in this paper for the past five years.

When The Globe dropped cigarette advertising, it did so knowing that a large amount of advertising income was involved, but out of the conviction that cigarette smoking is dangerous to one's health and that therefore cigarette advertising was against the public interest.

The Globe was one of the first major newspapers in the country to adopt this policy. A relatively small number of others followed suit, but most seem to have changed their minds after a consent order was issued by the Federal Trade Commission on Jan. 31, 1972, requiring all cigarette advertising to include a "clear and conspicuous health warning" under threat of $5000 civil penalty per violation.

It has been 10 years now since US Surgeon-General Luther L. Terry issued his famous report warning that cigarette smoking is injurious to health and greatly increased the risk of lung cancer and other diseases. Today the accumulating medical evidence to this effect is far stronger. Lung cancer kills 72,000 Americans a year, and about 75 percent of these deaths are attributable to cigarette smoking. The latter also contributes to other forms of cancer and causes emphysema.

Put another way, the risk of dying of lung cancer is 4½ times as great for those who smoke less than half a pack a day as for those who never smoked; it is 18.77 times as great for those smoking two packs or more. In general, the lung cancer rate for smokers is nearly eight times higher; and the heart disease rate is twice as high.

Such facts should be enough to end all smoking. Instead, 10 years after the Terry Report, cigarette sales are at a record high (583 billion smoked annually as against 524 billion a decade ago.) The number of cigarette smokers has increased from 50 to 52 million in the same 10 years.

Also during the decade since the Surgeon-General's report, newspapers in this nation have been under heavy assault to prove their credibility.

Within The Globe itself, the paper's policy against accepting cigarette advertising has been questioned. The issue was raised that the policy amounted to censorship by The Globe, as it tried to influence the habits of the public.

The policy was considered by some to discriminate against a product which was perfectly legal to buy. Alcohol, for example, is also accepted as potentially dangerous to human health. But, like cigarettes, the sale of alcohol is not prohibited by law. And The Globe accepts advertisements for liquor.

The Globe has reconsidered its position and has decided there is a larger question here—one of access, a responsibility to its public to allow the varying voices of the community appropriate access to its advertising space.

The paid columns of a newspaper are somewhat like a freight train, available to carry all products, the movement of which is not forbidden by law. If the power to restrict the freight is used unilaterally and extensively and indiscriminately, may not society begin to wonder whether such a life-and-death grip on economic activity should be conferred on a purely private and perhaps even elite group? And should a newspaper have the right to impose its view by economic sanctions? We think not.

It is true that The Globe, in resuming the use of cigarette advertising, will benefit financially. However, it is important that readers know monetary gain was not the controlling factor in our decision to permit cigarette advertising to return to the paper.

The ultimate issue here was whether The Globe had the right to censor from its pages any legal industry today, particularly in view of the required health warning on all cigarette ads. We know many of our readers will deeply regret this change. We ask for their understanding and pledge to do all we can on our editorial page to discourage the smoking of cigarettes.

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